

Message Text

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 COTONO 00276 071207Z
ACTION AF-08

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 L-03 H-01 SCS-03 SCA-01 PPT-01 PC-01
SY-05 OPR-02 OC-06 CCO-00 AID-05 COME-00 AGRE-00
TRSE-00 PER-01 /038 W
-----071300Z 080926 /53

R 070931Z FEB 77
FM AMEMBASSY COTONOU
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9353
INFO AMEMBASSY ABIDJAN
AMEMBASSY DAKAR
AMEMBASSY LAGOS
AMEMBASSY LOME
AMEMBASSY NIAMEY
AMEMBASSY OUAGADOUGOU

C O N F I D E N T I A L COTONOU 0276

EO 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINS PINT CASC DM
SUBJ: BENIN COUP ATTEMPT AFTERMATH:TRAVEL

REF: A STATE 25322 B COTONOU 275

SUMMARY: TRAVEL RESTRUCTIONS ARE STILL IN EFFECT IN VARIOUS
AREAS OF INTERIOR. POSSIBILITY OF SPECIFIC INJUNCTIONS ON
PEACE CORPS VOLUNTEER TRAVEL, AND THERE IS SOME EVIDENCE THAT
AMERICANS ARE SPECIAL OBJECT OF SECURITY FORCE'S ATTENTION.
END SUMMARY.

1. THREE WEEKS HAVE ELAPSED SINCE THE JANUARY 16 ATTACK ON
COTONOU, AND AN ATMOSPHERE OF CALM HAS RETURNED TO THE CITY.
ALTHOUGH COTONOU STILL BRISTLES WITH AK-47 TOTING SOLDIERS
AND GENDARMES, THEY ARE GENERALLY RELAXED AND FRIENDLY. NIGHT
SECURITY CONTROLS ARE STILL IN EVIDENCE BUT ARE NOW A ROUTINE
EXERCISE. THERE IS USUALLY NO PROBLEM CIRCULATING IN THE CITY,
PROVIDED ONE HAS HIS DOCUMENTS IN ORDER AND SPEAKS
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PAGE 02 COTONO 00276 071207Z

ENOUGH FRENCH TO EXPLAIN HIS BUSINESS AND NEED TO TRAVEL.
HOWEVER, ONE PCV WAS APPREHENDED DURING DAYLIGHT HOURS FEB 3 AND
WAS SAVED FROM ARREST AND DETENTION ONLY BY INTERVENTION OF ONE
OF HIS ENGLISH STUDENTS.

2. SITUATION IN THE INTERIOR VARIES ON A DISTRICT-TO-DISTRICT
BASIS, DEPENDING ON PERSONAL IDEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES OF DIS-

TRICT CHIEFS AND PROVINCE PREFECTS. IN THE SOUTHEASTERN OUEME PROVINCE, SECURITY CONTROLS WERE REMOVED WITHIN A WEEK AFTER THE ATTACK, AND THE BORDER WITH NIGERIA WAS OPENED JANUARY 26. IN MOST OF THE NORTHWESTERN ATACORA PROVINCE, SITUATION HAS RELAXED. TIGHT SECURITY PROCEDURES CONTINUE IN MONO PROVINCE NEAR TOGO, IN THE CENTRAL ZOU PROVINCE, AND IN BORGOU PROVINCE ALONG THE PARAKOU-MALANVILLE ROUTE. BORDER WITH TOGO REMAINS CLOSED.

3. TARGETS FOR THE SECURITY PROCEDURES IN FORCE ARE FOREIGNERS, RESIDENT OR TOURISTS, AND DEGREE OF ENFORCEMENT SEEMS TO DEPEND ON HOW MUCH HARASSMENT THE LOCAL ADMINISTRATOR WISHES TO CREATE FOR THEM. WILLINGNESS TO CREATE HARASSMENT CORRELATES WITH REVOLUTIONARY FERVOR OF ADMINISTRATOR. PCV GERALD ANDERSON AND SEVEN EUROPEAN TOURISTS WERE ARRESTED IN GRAND POPO ON JANUARY 26, APPARENTLY AT THE WISHES OF MONO PREFECT SANNA MAMA GOMINA, ONE OF HARD-CORE CIVILIAN IDEOLOGUES ON CENTRAL COMMITTEE. PCV DEBORAH OWEN WAS ARRESTED AND DETAINED AFTERNOON OF JANUARY 19 AT HER SITE AT APLAHOUE ON ORDERS FROM DISTRICT CHIEF GASTON AHO, WITH WHOM EMBASSY HAS DEALT ON SELF-HELP PROJECTS. AHO IS SELF-STYLED REVOLUTIONARY BORDER LORD. DISTRICT CHIEFS IN ZOU, MONO AND BORGOU PROVINCES WHERE FOREIGNERS' MOVEMENTS ARE CURTAILED ALSO POSSESS REVOLUTIONARY CREDENTIALS. ONE REASON FOR CALM IN OUEME PROVINCE IS ABSENCE OF PREFECT GRATIEN CAPO-CHICHI, WHO IS IN COTONOU AS POLITICAL BOSS OF NATIONAL COMMISSION OF INQUIRY.

4. EMBASSY HAS RECEIVED REPORT THAT RESTRICTION ON VOLUNTEERS' CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 03 COTONO 00276 071207Z

MOVEMENT IS RESULT OF COMMUNIQUE FROM PARTY CENTRAL COMMITTEE. PCV APPROACHED DIRECTOR OF PROVINCE AGRICULTURAL SERVICE (CARDER) FOR LAISSEZ PASSER AND WAS TOLD OF CENTRAL COMMITTEE ORDERS. EMBOFF HAS SEEN MINISTRY OF INTERIOR COMMUNIQUE REQUESTING DISTRICT CHIEFS TO REGISTER ALL VOLUNTEERS. EMBASSY CAN OFFER NO SPECULATION ON WHEN RESTRICTIONS WILL BE LIFTED.

5. AT AIRPORT, EMBOFF WAITING TO MEET EXPECTED OFFICIAL VISITORS WITNESSED HARASSMENT OF TWO AMERICAN TOURISTS. THEY WERE PLACED AT END OF LINE AT POLICE CHECK AND THEN SUBJECTED TO INTENSIVE IDENTITY VERIFICATION AND BAGGAGE SEARCH PROCEDURES. INTERROGATION OF POLICE YIELDED NO RESULTS, SINCE TOURISTS SPOKE NO FRENCH. AS SOLDIERS AND POLICE GATHERED, AND TOURISTS BECAME BEWILDERED AND PANICKY AT THE SIGHT OF THEIR SCOWLING FACES AND LOWERED AK-47'S, EMBOFF WAS GRANTED ACCESS TO SERVE AS TRANSLATOR. AFTER EXTENDED ASSURANCES THAT EMBASSY WOULD TAKE RESPONSIBILITY FOR THEIR WELFARE, TOURISTS WERE ALLOWED TO EXIT ARRIVAL AREA.

6. COMMENT: EMBASSY REGARDS HARASSMENT AND RESTRICTIONS ON
MOVEMENT PRIMARILY RESULT OF COMBINATION OF POST-COUP
NERVOUSNESS AND REPETITIVE XENOPHOBIC RHETORIC OF GPRB
MEDIA. THOMPSON

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